

# The Impact of

# NATIONALISM ON JOINT FORCE PLANNING

By GEORGE W. PRICE

Nationalism has emerged as a powerful force in the post-Cold War world. Far from the *end of history* as presaged by Francis Fukuyama, there has been a return to history in gory detail. In much of Africa and Asia the contest between the two superpowers was a convenient mechanism for garnering economic aid and security assistance at a discount, but it was largely irrelevant in the context of regional politics. For example, in the Middle East, Arab/Israeli differences continued to fester independently of the superpowers, which became patrons of the opposing sides.

Perhaps the most dynamic changes have taken place in areas once dominated by the Soviet Union. Germany has been reunited, the Baltic states have reappeared, and numerous new nations, most without any independent existence in the modern era, have been established. In Yugoslavia, a bloody war has carved states out of a multiethnic nation. Similar changes are occurring around the world. Palestinians are negotiating with Israel for an autonomous state. U.N. forces protect Kurds in northern Iraq. In Africa, tribal

dynamics of nationalism will remain critical to regional security affairs and joint force planning.

## Planning Implications

Tension results from the struggle between two important contending forces in international politics, a political structure that equates the sovereign state with the highest form of organizational entity, and the desire of ethnic groups to establish and protect their national identities. Because the world has 183 sovereign states there is very little territory for new ones. Consequently, as ethnic groups seek to create national identities they compete with existing states, which is a major cause of international instability. During the Cold War this dynamic was not appreciated, largely because of the bipolar nature of international relations. Lesser powers cooperated in varying degrees with the United States or the Soviet Union. But the reality was more complex. Rather than remaining bipolar, with the expectation that a unipolar international system would later emerge, the end of the Cold War restored a multipolar world increasingly driven by contentious nationalist rivalries.

This trend is seen in the collapse of empire and reemergence of national components from within. The Soviet Union fragmented into fifteen

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differences threaten to reshape the political landscape from Liberia to Somalia. Even in Western Europe, traditional Flemish/Walloon friction has been revived in Belgium while Basque separatists continue to harass the Spanish government.

Thus nationalism has reemerged as a critical factor in restructuring the international political scene in the post-Cold War era. Understanding the

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nations. Yugoslavia broke into three with a fourth still evolving. This duality between self-determination and sovereignty has become a fundamental source of instability in international politics. It forces international actors to balance aspirations of national groups against the reality of an existing structure of recognized sovereign states. Joint planners who look at regional crises must wrestle on the horns of this dilemma.

### National Struggles

The world is replete with examples of the quest for national status run amok. Oppression of minority rights is often the first restriction on emerging ethnic national groups. This includes outlawing native language, discouraging trade, and even relocating minority groups. Numerous cases of repression of minority rights exist in Africa and Asia as competing ethnic national groups seek power. In Burundi, majority Hutus are locked in sporadic conflict with minority Tutsis. The assassination of President Doe of Liberia pitted his ethnic Krahn group in a civil war against the rebel Charles Taylor whose supporters are primarily ethnic Gio and Mano. In Bhutan thousands of ethnic Nepalese have suffered under government oppression. In Indonesia long-term repression in East Timor has resulted in the death of nearly a third of a population of 600,000.

The second manifestation is the creation of refugee populations. The Arab-Israeli dispute is one example. Jewish refugees from World War II, in the spirit of Zionism, fueled the creation of the state of Israel in 1948. The end to their Diaspora, however, began one for Palestinians, who were driven from their homes and ultimately resettled in U.N.-sponsored camps. Recently, the horrors in Yugoslavia have generated a million refugees, not only Moslems, but also Croats and Serbs, as each group seeks the safety of its fellow nationals.

Terrorism is used as a tool by national groups which are frequently disaffected minorities. Not only Zionist and Palestinian organizations engage in terrorism; such action is employed around the world to garner publicity for national movements. The Provisional Irish Republican Army, for example, has no consistent program to drive the British out of Northern Ireland, but the bombing campaigns in both Ulster and Britain have demonstrated the virulence that moves nationalist groups to indiscriminate acts of violence.

Forced expulsion (repatriation) is another tool used by majority national groups to eliminate or adjust population boundaries. Stalin used this to control national minorities in the Soviet Union. Volga Germans were relocated thousands of miles from their homes to ensure that they would not create a fifth column in support of the Nazis during World War II. Russians were moved

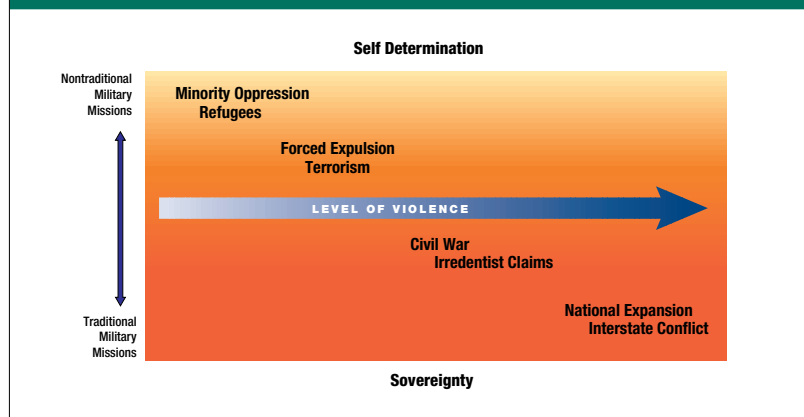
into the Baltic states and Balts were moved out to the eastern Soviet Union. Stalin used similar relocations to blur national identities. Following independence in India and Pakistan hundreds of thousands of people moved from one nation to the other to avoid becoming minorities in the new national entities that replaced the rule of the British raj. Such actions have tremendous individual costs as well as economic and social consequences, and they are not necessarily successful as is evidenced by the continued friction between India and Pakistan.

Highly organized ethnic nationalist groups may resort to civil war to establish their claims. In the late sixties an effort by the Ibo minority of Nigeria failed to establish Biafra as a new state. The current constitutional crisis in Nigeria suggests that renewed ethnic conflict could occur in the most populous nation in Africa. Bosnia is the best contemporary example of a civil war between rival national groups, Bosnian Moslems and Bosnian Serbs. Because of the intense ethnic hatreds, an agreement eluded diplomats for years during which time human suffering grew steadily worse.

Irredentist claims serve as a means for outside nations to support conationals who live as minorities in other states. The war between the Soviet successor states of Armenia and Azerbaijan illustrate this problem. The Armenian enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh inside Azerbaijan has become a source of conflict. Because Azerbaijan does not share a border with Armenia, either supporting or annexing this territory has been impossible. Instead, using Soviet arms, each side has sought to break the will of the other through military action. The result has been an effective destruction of the territory with no resolution by the groups involved. The Armenians are seeking access through a narrow corridor to create a territorial linkage which has not been achieved by force or diplomacy.

The Soviet breakup offers similar opportunities for irredentist claims, the most important of them involving Russians left in newly established states. Significant Russian minorities remain in the new Baltic states whose policies regarding minority rights are not encouraging. Estonia, for example, has enacted measures that have an adverse impact on the remaining Russian population. These especially pertain to use of the Estonian language and rights to employment, schooling, and public services. Formerly the majority in the Soviet Union, the Russians resent such changes; yet they continue to view the land where they have lived for generations as their home. This may lead to pressure for Russia to intervene in support of its conationals, who have become a minority.

## Division between Issues



Similar problems exist in Eastern Europe. Hungarian minorities in the Transylvania region of Romania have been a source of friction since the Treaty of Trianon after World War I awarded this primarily Hungarian region to Romania. Hungarian minorities in the Vojvodina portion of Serbia represent another possible irredentist claim for Budapest. Thus far the Hungarians have not been caught up in the ethnic conflict between the Serbs and Croats, who are their neighbors. But if conflict resumes and Vojvodina is involved, Budapest may act to protect the Hungarian minority.

Often expansionist conflicts are justified as efforts to regain territory to which nations have historic claims. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait was rationalized on such grounds. The Iraqis appealed to British colonial maps that dated to World War I.

## much instability can be explained in terms of ethnic nationalism

A resurgence of Russian nationalism may lead to the use of force to reclaim territories lost after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Claims against weak states like Tadjikistan or Georgia might succeed absent a response from the international community. Military action to regain Ukraine may be more difficult, given the size and resources of that new nation and its solid national identity. Macedonia is another state that could disappear as a result of Serb, Greek, or Bulgarian claims to portions of its territory.

Finally, interstate conflict can be driven by national rivalries. The Indo-Pakistani conflicts of the Cold War and the Chad-Libya border dispute are examples. Serbia and Croatia have settled into an uneasy truce resulting from exhaustion and the diversion of the war in Bosnia. The conflict could reemerge as both parties reassess their relative positions. In the Middle East, rivalry between Israel and its neighbors is another case of interstate conflict driven in part by ethnic nationalism.

Much of the instability that arose in the post-Cold War world can be explained in terms of ethnic nationalism and competing groups which are asserting their power and authority. Coming to terms with these dynamics will challenge joint force planners into the next century.

## Responding to Nationalism

Joint force planning recently has been entangled in nationally derived conflicts. Operations Desert Shield/Desert Storm responded in part to national expansion. The U.N. Protection Force (UNPROFOR) went to the Balkans in 1992 to check a conflict between Serbs and Croats, and the NATO Implementation Force (IFOR) now has been deployed in Bosnia under the Dayton accords. The accompanying figure lists traditional missions and nontraditional missions on a vertical axis. The former refer to warfighting and related operations while the latter refer to areas of humanitarian assistance, civic action, and low intensity conflict that were peripheral concerns to planners during the Cold War. The broad red band indicates the divide between self-determination and sovereignty that creates a conceptual firebreak. It suggests that ethnic national conflict can be categorized into (1) early efforts at self-determination, (2) a murky level of direct challenges to sovereign states by ethnic national groups, and (3) conflict arising among sovereign states over ethnic national issues.

The interaction below the band in the figure occurs between sovereign nations. This type of conflict is easily understood since the alternatives are relatively clear cut. Whether to intervene and which state to support remain difficult decisions. It means siding with one national element or another. In the Gulf War, the United States and most other nations supported Kuwait over Iraq. This type of conflict tends to have straightforward post-conflict objectives. The main objective in the Gulf was restoration of Kuwaiti sovereignty.

Such conflicts will not present serious planning problems in the future. The current major regional contingencies (MRCs) on which the United States has decided to focus are of this type. The first sees Iran or Iraq seeking to establish itself as regional hegemon in Southwest Asia. These actions fit the category of wars of national expansion and interstate conflict described above. The second focuses on the Korean peninsula. Here, two sovereign states are competing to represent the national will of the Korean people. Other possible conflicts of this type, such as a war between Russia and Ukraine, pose significant resource implications for joint planners but do not represent serious conceptual challenges in terms of traditional planning.



Kuwaitis entering their capital.



Graves at Olympic complex in Sarajevo.

U.S. Air Force (Michael J. Haggerty)



American arrival in Haiti.

Combat Camera Imagery (Val Gempis)

Kurdish guard in northern Iraq.



Combat Camera Imagery (Theodore J. Koniarek)

Similarly, actions above the band are relatively well understood. U.S. Special Operations Command has hundreds of individuals involved in humanitarian assistance operations worldwide. They provide low level, nonintrusive support to improve the professional skills of foreign military organizations. Similar objectives are achieved by the international military education and training (IMET) program. The Coast Guard conducted operations in the Caribbean to deal with refugees from Haiti and Cuba. During the Cold War the Armed Forces helped thousands of Hungarians who fled after the 1956 uprising. The U.N. High

Commissioner for Refugees also has provided international experience in dealing with these problems, primarily in Israel and Palestine as well as in India and Pakistan. Although they pose challenges to execute, such operations do not represent a major departure. Thus, the military must be equipped to plan and execute operations involving ethnic conflict at the extremes of the self-determination/sovereignty axis.

Joint force planners have the greatest difficulty dealing with ethnic nationalism in the murky area where efforts to achieve self-determination run into direct conflict with established sovereign states. This is because of the fundamental dichotomy between nation and state in the international political system. It is in this arena that forced expulsions, terrorism, and civil wars occur. While international norms recognize the right of self-determination, it is only when these efforts succeed and the ethnic national group

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achieves sovereign statehood that the international community can deal with a new nation. It is precisely this unease that exists in Provide Comfort in northern Iraq, which has protected the Kurds from the Iraqis and enabled them to return home. However, it has not supported Kurdish efforts to establish a sovereign state that would reach across the borders of Iran and Turkey. In addition, planners have responded to refugee flows resulting from oppression of minorities, including the exodus after the victory by the Tutsi minority in the Rwandan civil war where foreign troops had to deal with more than a million Hutu refugees.

### Projecting Neutrality

The bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut showed the difficulties which foreign troops face when they are identified as taking sides in ethnic nationalist conflicts. Lebanese Moslems saw American forces as supporting the Christian dominated Lebanese forces. Clausewitz declared that a commander must understand the

new qualitative assessment is necessary to plan for the future. The resurgence of ethnic nationalism helps explain changes in the international political system. In the wake of the collapse of the Soviet empire and turmoil generated in Asia and Africa by the residual arbitrary impact of colonialism, the basic organizational structure will be that of the ethnic nation. Moreover, this ethnic nationalism will seek to establish itself through sovereignty. To the extent that this process is not peaceful—and it normally is not—the United States and other nations seeking to encourage peaceful change will be challenged to intervene. This will necessitate some type of military operation, often in combination with diplomatic and economic actions.

Depending on the level of conflict, a decision to respond can be relatively straightforward. If sovereign states use force, the international system has established mechanisms with which to respond. But when situations fall into the area generally regarded as the internal affairs of nation-states, planning becomes more complex. But even there, military forces offer various options such as education and training, humanitarian assistance, blockades to support economic sanctions, and antiterrorist capabilities to redress crises which result from the excesses of nationalists. This is not to suggest that outside intervention is required in all disputes. Far from it. That would greatly exceed available defense and economic resources, not to mention the political will, of any major power.

Understanding ethnic nationalism allows for prioritization within a common framework and demonstrates that not everything has changed. Many operational capabilities of the Armed Forces are well suited to the challenges of ethnic nationalism along the sovereignty/self-determination axis, from humanitarian relief on one hand to conflict between sovereign states on the other. It is in the gray area where ethnic national groups threaten existing states that both planning and operational difficulties occur. Civil wars, terrorist acts, mass expulsions, and irredentist claims are complex problems in which competing ethnic national groups represent diametrically opposed viewpoints. U.S. forces cannot operate effectively on a tightrope between the two. Planners must incorporate mission statements supporting one objective or the other, not necessarily exclusively, but in terms of operational objectives that can be achieved by the military. Anything short of that places such forces, either national or international, in an untenable position. **JFQ**

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type of war he is engaged in and *not* make it something it is not, advice which is critical in ethnic conflict. Decisionmakers can agree to deploy forces in a neutral fashion but in practice this is achieved rarely if at all. International forces may try to achieve that goal, but those with whom they deal may not allow them to play a neutral role. General Aideed did not view U.N. forces as impartial in the struggle among rival Somali warlords, and Bosnian Serbs did not see UNPROFOR as neutral during the siege of Sarajevo. When a decision is made to use military means in ethnic national conflicts, planners should insist that any mission statement clearly reflect whether forces should support the sovereign state or protect efforts by a minority to achieve self-determination. Plans designed only to reduce violence or suffering are doomed to fail.

The initial success of Restore Hope in Somalia and Desert Storm in Iraq demonstrate that the Armed Forces can undertake such ventures successfully. It is virtually impossible for forces placed in such situations to be both effective and neutral. If the decision is made to employ military forces in terrorist, civil war, or irredentist types of conflicts, the forces should go in with a clear mission statement. Choosing sovereignty or self-determination compels decisionmakers to have a clear objective when employing military forces.

To cope with post-Cold War challenges, joint force planners must understand the dynamics that are transforming the international order. A